# Eskimo Kayaks

SJM II-Y-34

## Cape Espenberg Kayak

Sitting on top of the *Eskimo mask* case, the Cape Espenberg kayak illustrates one type of craft found in and around the Bering Straits. Shorter and narrower than kayaks further south, the Cape Espenberg style has a rigid deck, an upward sweeping bow with a built-in handhold, and a cockpit large enough for two people sitting back to back.

The museum's kayak measures 14 feet 5 inches and weighs under forty pounds. The Eskimo hunter mannequin appears prepared to hunt, equipped with a seal skin float, a paddle, a line tray with ookruk line, a seal intestine parka, and a dart for a throwing board.

SJM II-E-95

## King Island Kayak

Hanging upside down near the Aleut baidarka, a King Island kayak shows wear from stormy seas and heavy ice floes of the Bering Straits. King Island, about 30 miles off the Seward Peninsula coast, rises several hundred feet above the sea, giving the Inupiat Eskimo hunters an excellent view of surrounding waters. However, the precipitous cliffs offered no beach access. In order to get past the turbulent breakers surrounding their home, hunters developed a unique means of launching their kayaks. A hunter climbed into his craft perched on the rocky coast, secured his gut parka around the cockpit rim and readied his paddle. Several men from the village picked up the hunter in his kayak and as a wave washed in they threw their companion over the surf into calmer waters. Once in the water, hunters often lashed their boats together to form a catamaran for hauling game and supplies. In order to withstand the extremes of launching, combined with the rough seas and incessant ice floes of the Bering Straits, the King Islanders used a combination of walrus and bearded seal hide, both thick, heavy materials, to cover the framework of their kayaks. Closely spaced ribs, a rigid deck of birch and willow and curved deck beams add strength to the kayak's fragile-looking frame.

*King Island-type kayak. Lomen Brothers photo.*

The museum's King Island kayak measures 14 feet 8 inches long and weighs around 40 pounds. Storing kayaks upside down and resting on their gunwales takes the weight off the craft's frame.

SJM II-Y-33

# Kotzebue Sound/Point Barrow Kayak

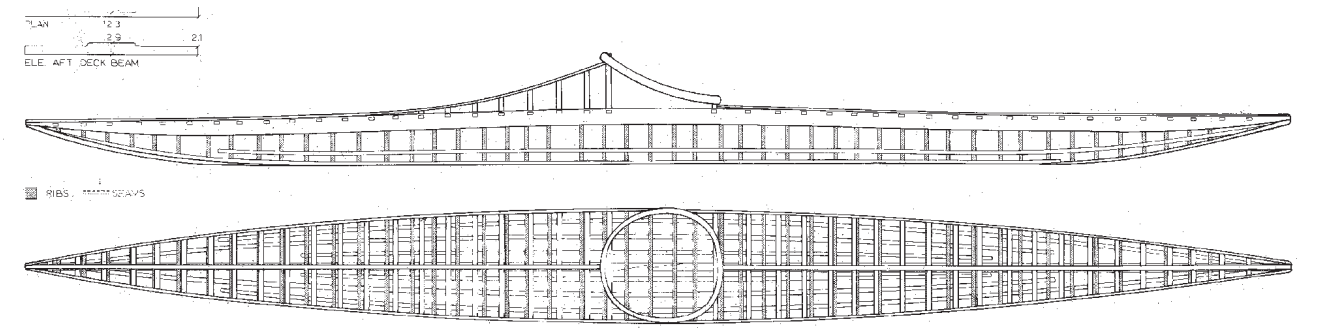
The museum's northern style kayak, collected by Dr. Jackson at Cape Krusenstern on Kotzebue Sound hangs upside down above the *Eskimo Clothing* case.

Long and narrow with a shallow rounded bottom, these craft were known for their speed and beauty; however, they also had a reputation for instability and capsizing. A hunter required great skill to keep his kayak upright. Except for an abrupt rise in the front of the cockpit the decks are flat. This feature helped to shed waves and keep the kayaker dry in the absence of a spray skirt.

Coastal Inupiat Eskimos used the craft for hunting seal along the edge of the ice in early spring and summer. Inland the Nunimuit used them on lakes and rivers for hunting caribou. Often a small sled sat on the back of the boat to be used if the kayak had to be pulled over ice floes. Geographic location also determined materials used to build the boat. Coastal kayak builders covered their boats with sea mammal hide and inland groups used caribou hide. The Kotzebue kayak on exhibit is thought to be covered with split walrus hide.

A single bladed paddle allowed a hunter to quietly maneuver close to his game while his double bladed paddle provided speed for the chase. Examples of both paddle types can be seen in the upper wall exhibit of Eskimo paddles.

Sheldon Jackson collected this example in 1890 at Cape Krusenstern on his first visit to Arctic Alaska. The overall length of the boat is 17 feet 7 1/2 inches long and it weighs around 30 pounds.

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